The **Anxiety Disorder Game:**

How to Win

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R. Reid Wilson, Ph.D.
Chapel Hill, NC, USA

R. Reid Wilson, Ph.D.

Anxiety Disorders Treatment Center
3011 Jones Ferry Rd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
[919] 942-0700 phone/fax

rrw@med.unc.edu
www.anxieties.com

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Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment

- Relaxation & breathing skills
- Cognitive restructuring
- Exposure strategies
- Ritual prevention

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Interferences with Success in Current Treatment

➡ Our <u>belief systems</u>—about how to handle arousal & solve problems— <u>overpower</u> therapeutic <u>suggestions</u>
➡ We all worry
➡ Errors in anxiety disorder thinking

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We all worry

- Provides us drive
- Motivates us to prioritize tasks
- Motivates us to get tasks done
- Use it to kick-start problem-solving process
- Worry becomes our talisman to ward off discomfort

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Common Anxiety Disorder Thinking & Acting

- Exaggerate worry
  - Brace for worst
  - Worry to prepare for trouble
  - Worry to be sure of decisions & to increase comfort
- Hold back from acting to avoid mistake
- Keep your mind off distressing thoughts
- Stop uncomfortable symptoms as soon as they arise (don't get tense!)

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These moves increase problems that they are designed to prevent

- When we resist physical symptoms of anxiety, we ensure that anxiety will continue
- Anytime we generate fearful thought like, "I better not get anxious here," we essentially say, "uh, oh" in cortex

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Primary Therapeutic Goal: Look for Chances to Get Anxious

→ It is counter-productive to try to stay relaxed

→ It is best to seek out discomfort, & then take care of yourself

→ Let emotional & physical arousal come forward, without resistance
  → Don't try to think your way out of anxiety
  → Learn to tolerate symptoms: "It's OK that I'm anxious right now"

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Leveraging the Habitual Model

Frequency

Intensity

Duration

"Please stay!": Modifying the Habituation Model

- Systematic Desensitization (Reciprocal Inhibition)
  - Evoke response that is physiologically incompatible with anxiety
- Flooding
  - Intense exposure to feared stimulus
- This Model
  - Flooding plus emotion that is incompatible with anxiety
  - The "as if" scenario

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Clients' relationships with three variables

Worry: fearful thoughts anticipating a dreaded experience

Uncertainty: anxiety-provoking state of not-knowing

Distressing symptoms: physical aspect of anxiety & panic

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Stances people take against anxiety

- "I don't want to be anxious."
- "I don't want to be worried."
- "I want the anxiety to stop."
- "I want the worry to stop."
- "I should be worrying."
- "I want to know how things will be resolved."
- "I don't want to take any risk."
- "What's wrong with me! I shouldn't feel/think this way."

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The Existential Game

The symptoms of anxiety are not wrong. They are valueless. They just are.

We are free to choose our judgments in this neutral situation.

The disorders win when we choose the negative.

So… Choose the positive and become a subject in the Game instead of an Object.

Goal: in face of symptoms/worry/ uncertainty...

…to express any emotion synonymous to:

✓ <u>Being excited</u> that worry, uncertainty or distress is present,
✓ <u>Encouraging</u> it to continue, &
✓ <u>Hoping</u>, if possible, for it to grow stronger

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Clients' Orientation Toward Doubt and Distress

| This is (or will be) horrible. I'll lose if this happens! | I really don't want this to happen. | I can tolerate this happening. | I want this to happen, I choose it. | I <u>really</u> want it to keep happening. | I win if it keeps happening |

RESIST ➡ PERMIT ➡ PROVOKE

Anxiety wins   Client wins

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Feeling States That We Are Shooting For

✓ Being excited
✓ Desiring
✓ Seeking out
✓ Encouraging
✓ Wanting

✓ Pleading for more
✓ Cajoling
✓ Urging
✓ Demanding more

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The Anxiety Disorder Game

- **As if:** You are in a relationship with anxiety symptom (distress, worry or uncertainty)
- **As if:** You have direct request of anxiety symptom
- **As if:** You will stop at nothing in your quest to create that change in anxiety symptom
- **As if:** You are requesting that symptom do something opposite of what it expects
- **As if:** You are trying to convince anxiety symptom of your sincerity (not trying to literally have a feeling)

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Keep in mind...

➤ There is a pre-existing "as if" scenario in place: they are operating as if there is something dangerous about to occur!

➤ We are working to <u>replace</u> that, not to invent something brand new.

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Trumping Anxiety: The Game

The Experience	Client's Expected Move: Resist (Anxiety Disorder Wins)	Client's Unexpected Move: Stand Down (Client Wins)	
		Permit	Provoke
Feeling scared		"Yes."	
Experiencing discomfort			"More! Please!"
Embarrassed	"Please, no!"	"It's OK."	
Feeling distress/discomfort	"I can't tolerate it."		"Stronger! Please!"
Worrying people might notice mistakes or symptoms	"Stop!"	"I can handle this."	
Noticing symptoms getting stronger	"I can't allow that to continue."	"I don't have to stop it."	"I'm <u>wanting</u> this."
Doubt/uncertainty			
Going toward threat			

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Trumping Anxiety: The Game Cont'd

The Experience	Client's Expected Move: Resist (Anxiety Disorder Wins)	Client's Unexpected Move: Stand Down (Client Wins)	
		Permit	Provoke
Content of worry	"It's important!" "It's a signal!" "Pay attention to it!" "Address it!"	"It's irrelevant." "Don't be distracted by it." "It is just noise." "Don't respond to it."	

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<u>Event Log</u>
Date of last appointment: _____

Event date	Location	Delay	Rwd	Pts	Pts Tot	Intensity	Dys btwn
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____
_____	school / home	A B C D E F G H I J	a b c	1 2 3	_____	_____	_____

Delay: A= turn shirt inside out   D=run around 3x   G=straight to Mom
            B=go to room & get an item   E=bring Mom something   H-delay Mom/30 min
            C=count backwards   F=stand 10' away & talk   I=not see Mom
                                                                                              J=at school/delay poster

Reward: each event: a=1/2 hr late bedtime, b=book, c-game/toy/cards
              8 points: computer game, board game, sports gear, DVD/CD

Points: 1=straight to Mom, 2=30 min delay before Mom or @ school/posters, 3=not see Mom

Intensity: scale of 1 to 10

Days between: Number of days since last event

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1 point	Notice I'm anxious/scared, uncertain or worried in public or approaching public situation
1 point	Decide to be glad about that and reflect it (small smile)
1 point	Ask symptoms to stay <u>and meaning it</u>
2 points	Make my best effort to respond to symptom by (check which ones):

___Being excited   ___Pleading for more
___Desiring feeling   ___Cajoling
___Seek out more of it   ___Urging
___Encouraging it   ___Demanding more
___Really wanting it

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1 point	Every minute <u>I invite it</u> (using above 9 choices) to stay & it does
2 points	Hoping that anxious/scared, uncertain or worried feelings get <u>stronger</u> & <u>trying to mean it</u>
2 points	Sensing others can see nervousness or notice you making a mistake, & being OK with it
1 point (each time)	When over, consider event as practice, dropping all self criticism (once I notice criticism)

TOTAL POINTS: _____

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Free self-help website

anxieties COM

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